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“Notched with a Pocketknife on a Table’s Edge”:

George Grosz’s Answer to War Graphics, 1914-16

Sherwin Simmons

Writing to a friend in April 1916, George Grosz attributed his impoverished situation to his inability as an “individualist” to conform “to the field of so-called war graphics, which is so profitable at the moment” (*Briefe* 34).¹ Since Grosz stood at the beginning of a promising career as a graphic artist before the outbreak of war, his absence from this new area for the application of his talents was unusual, particularly since contribution to the war art journals and portfolios quickly became important to artists.² Just two months after he mentioned his refusal to participate, two of his drawings (figs. 1 & 2) appeared in *Neue Jugend*, the journal that Wieland Herzfelde had taken over with the aim of making it a vehicle through which intellectuals could “unite to oppose external enemies” (Herzfelde, “Nachwort”). Herzfelde believed that the drawings pointed the way to new artistic and political strategies, which have been well discussed in scholarship about *Neue Jugend* (White; Zervigón, *John Heartfield*).

Grosz’s development to that point has, however, has been less addressed, particularly the role that war graphics played in the undermining of traditional claims about art.³ A striking aspect of his autobiography is his repeated anger over having been deceived by art and life, a reaction strongly voiced in a letter of 15 December 1917 that describes *The Funeral Procession – Dedicated to Oskar Panizza* as “a big picture of hell – a schnapps alley with a grotesque figure of death and madmen . . . the personification of death rides on a crosswise coffin through the picture to the left, on the right a young man vomits, he spews all the lovely youthful illusions into the picture” (*Briefe* 56).⁴

¹ Except where noted, all translations are mine.

² For recent discussions of war graphics, see Schneider et al. and Brakensiek.

³ For discussion of his drawings to 1915, see Dückers, “Der Zeichner George Grosz,” and Friedrich.

⁴ For a discussion of this painting in the tradition of the grotesque, see Bergius.

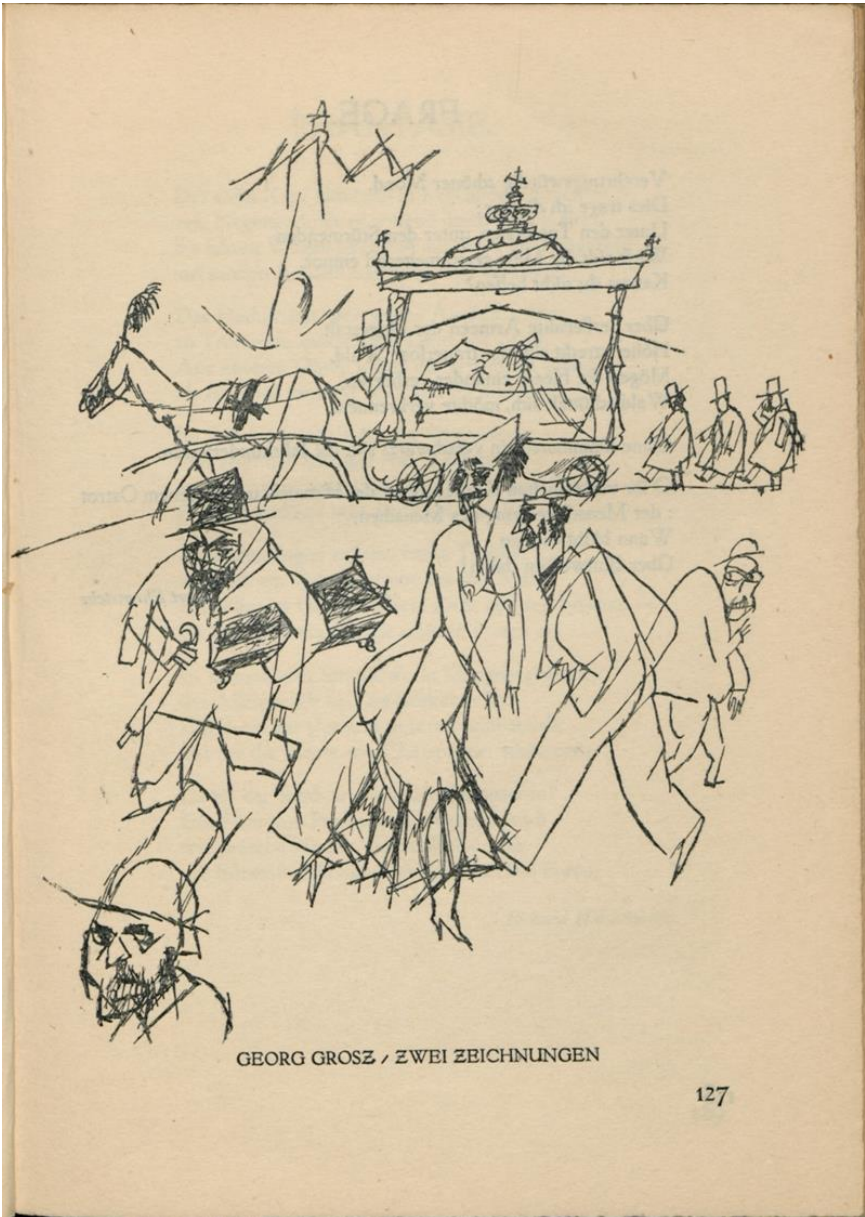


Figure 1: George Grosz, "Drawing (German Street Picture)," *Neue Jugend*, vol. 1, no. 7, July 1916, p. 127.

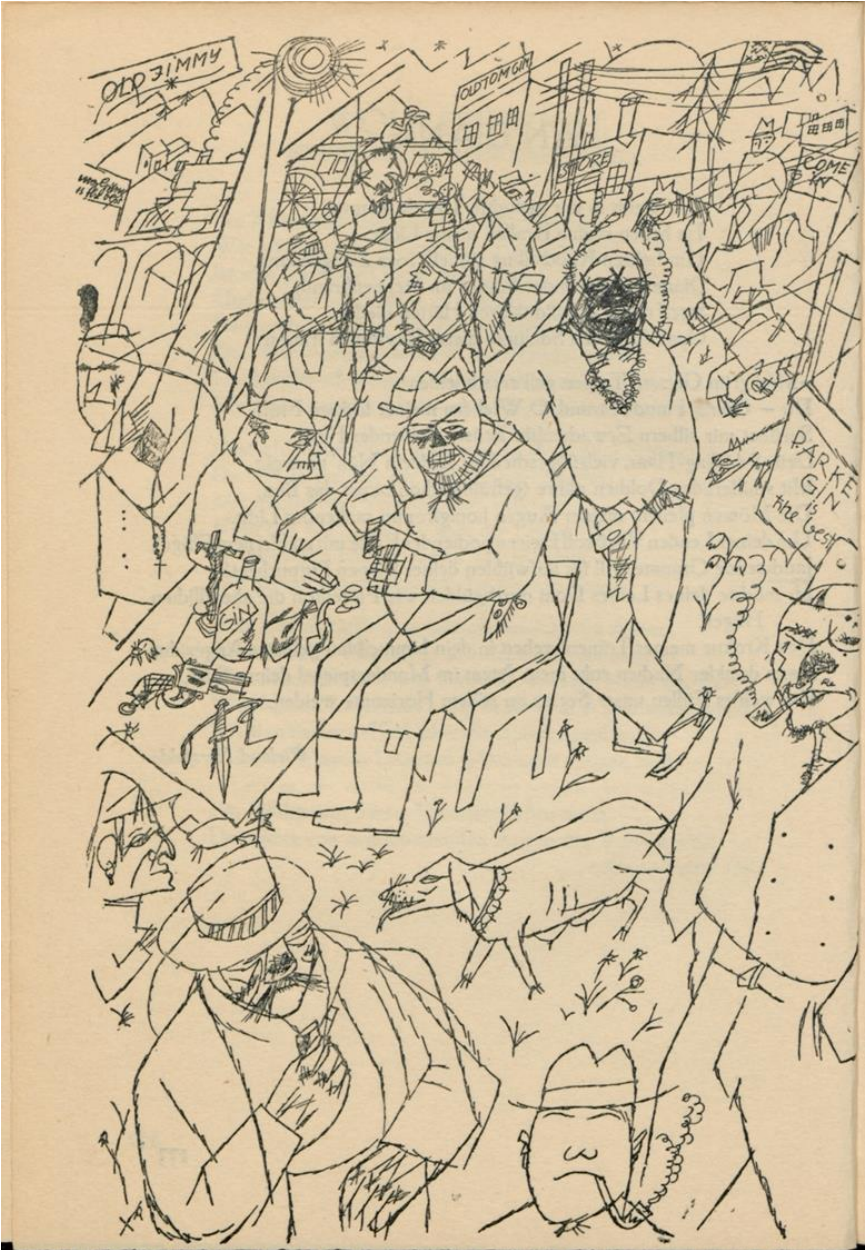


Figure 2: George Grosz, "Drawing (The Gold Diggers)." *Neue Jugend*, vol. 1, no. 7, July 1917, p. 134.

This article will examine Grosz's early work within the context of graphic art in Germany prior to and immediately after the events of August 1914 and discuss

how the intensification of its grotesque quality in response to war graphics, patriotic kitsch, and other propaganda helped shape the artistic style and content of his first images in *Neue Jugend*.

Witzblätter and the Grotesque

Writing about his youth spent in Stolp, a Pomeranian town, Grosz recalled that Eduard Grützner's genre scenes of beer halls and wine cellars, which he saw in journals and a book that his mother bought him, were his first artistic love.⁵ He was also enthralled by pictures of troops fighting in German East Africa, as well as original paintings of historic battles involving the Fifth (Pomeranian) Hussar Regiment, which he saw in an officers' club managed by his mother. He initially hoped to become an artist who could create paintings like those by Carl Röchling, Germany's most famous military artist, possibly combining them with Grützner-like scenes (Grosz, *Autobiography* 1, 10-11, 30-32, 52-59). After entering the Royal Saxon Academy of Fine Arts in Dresden in September 1909, however, he came to realize that his early artistic taste was petty bourgeois and, recognizing his talent for caricature, turned to what he was told would be a lucrative career as a modern illustrator. His first drawing was accepted by *Ullk* in early 1910, followed by some eight more small drawings which were published in various journals while he was in Dresden (Luckhardt 67-75).

Grosz, after graduating from the Academy, moved to Berlin in March 1912, where he enrolled in Emil Orlik's masters class for graphic arts at the Teaching Institute of the Arts and Crafts Museum. Orlik was a highly regarded printmaker and had extraordinary professional connections, so these facts, combined with the school's innovative curriculum, made it an excellent place to study illustration and graphic design (Singer 1; Poppenberg; White 106-11). Grosz continued to submit drawings to humor magazines, ten more being published in *Ullk* and *Lüstige Blätter* during 1912-1913. These became less stylized as his practice of sketching on the Berlin streets grew. None appeared as covers, but his sketchbooks show that he was responding to current events and attempting the type of political allegory that often appeared on the magazines' covers. An important example is a drawing entitled *The Modern Gulliver* and dated 20 January 1912 that addressed the unexpected success of the German Socialist Party (SPD) in the Reichstag election held on 12 January (Nisbet 17, 28 [11 recto], 66). Rather than a giant worker dressed in overalls, work boots, and *Ballonmütze* (balloon cap), which had recently become the topos of the SPD, Grosz drew a man in contemporary Anglo-American fashion, similar to that he had begun to wear, towering above the outskirts of a city and surrounded by reporters and photographers.⁶ The image suggests a certain

⁵ Grosz recalled that he received the book, a 1902 monograph by Fritz von Ostini, for Christmas. The book remained in his library (Akademie der Künste 114).

⁶ For the topos, see Maxilian Vanselow, "Happy New Year."

identification on his part with the SPD, something also seen in his memory of participation in a voting rights demonstration while in Dresden and his description of himself as social-democratic in a letter of 1913 (*Autobiography* 84-86; *Briefe* 127). However, within four months, he replaced the snappily dressed man with a corpulent, infantile giant whose body has been spotted with mud thrown by some members of the crowd, while others have fled or been crushed under his clumsy feet.⁷ This possibly reflects some disillusionment with the SPD, a feeling recalled in the autobiography as well as being expressed in letters (*Autobiography* 84; *Briefe* 31-32, 45).

The tension between observed exactitude and imagined grotesqueness seen in such drawings characterized two strands that were emerging in his art. Shortly after his arrival in Berlin, the city's industrial sprawl caught his eye, possibly stimulated by Rudolf Grossmann's artistic success with that theme. Grosz's sketchbooks are filled with similar images, some of which were developed as lithographs. He also drew people on the streets and in cafes; however, the realism of the sketches grew more expressive in singular drawings, as columns of hunched-over men trudging to work suggest an embittered and herd-like existence, while brawls occur between groups of drunken vagrants. Robbery, domestic assault, rape, murder, and suicide are frequently represented and all depictions of sexuality suggest excess, illicitness, and transgression (Jentsch 14-21). As in Jules Pascin's drawings, where small dogs often mix with humans, Grosz emphasized the animality of sex, making it even coarser and more turbulent.⁸ Wilhelm Michel, the author of a popular book entitled *Das Teuflische und Groteske in der Kunst*, described a drawing of this type in order to illustrate how laughter often served as a mask for horror (60-61). The book defined an artistic tradition very different from that of French modernism, which included Bruegel, Callot, Hogarth, Goya, and Daumier, artists whom Grosz mentioned as his models during this period ("Abwicklung" 36). Artists such as Heine, Kubin, and Munch continued the grotesque since it "best expresses the modern idea of the world, because it mixes, so to speak, the two sides of the world, without seeking reconciliation" (Michel 92).

While the satiric style found in *Simplicissimus* and other humor magazines was certainly one source for Grosz's grotesque taste, fantastic literature was also important. For instance, he shared the public's enthusiasm for *Altraune*, a novel of 1911 by Hans Heinz Ewers that relates a story, based on a myth about the mandrake root, in which a scientist artificially inseminates a prostitute with the ejaculate of a hanged criminal to produce a girl named Altraune (*Autobiography* 78). Much of Grosz's reading during these years was of this genre, as evidenced by designs for a cover of *Der Doktor Lerne: Ein Schauerroman*, a novel by Maurice

⁷ For its reproduction from Sketchbook 1912/3, see Lauer 493 (no. 11 1912/3).

⁸ Grosz certainly knew the drawings that Pascin had published in German humor magazines since 1905 and likely met him when he visited Grossmann, his close friend, in Berlin in 1912.

Renard that had been translated in 1909 (Jentsch 13). As a work of “scientific marvel fiction,” the book fantasizes about possible consequences of recent experiments in hybridization, leading to switching the brains of animals and humans, which, given the novel’s frequent sexual scenes, introduces themes of bestiality and transsexuality that accord with other drawings by Grosz (Després). It is likely that the Dr. Lerne drawings were self-generated; however, other covers may have been class assignments, since Orlik and E. R. Weiß, who also taught at the Teaching Institute, worked for Samuel Fischer, the publisher of several of the books.

Grosz first received public notice by an art journal with the publication of two drawings in *Licht und Schatten* in early 1914. Described as a “weekly publication of graphic art and poetry,” it had devoted full issues to artists as varied as Max Liebermann, Edvard Munch, Emil Orlik, and Max Pechstein, so Grosz must have been pleased to receive the recognition. Grosz’s drawings, which were titled “To Work” and “Revenge,” depict characteristic themes of workers and crime, but lack the grotesque, futurist, and expressionist qualities that had emerged in his most recent work (“Zur Arbeit” and “Gerächt”). Some dated drawings show that by 1914 he was well aware of the way artists such as Umberto Boccioni and Ernst Kirchner expressed urban dynamism through the use of force lines. (Jentsch 29, 64). The manner in which Ludwig Meidner and Jacob Steinhardt related this dynamism to an agitation within the urban population also drew his attention and he used the rush of space into depth and the pressure of figures against the pictorial frame to convey a violent frenzy within modern life. The violence of his scenes of domestic dispute was intensified by a more muscular thrust of forms, the radiance of light, and the energetic graffito of ink strokes (Sabarsky 7, 22). A final element of his distinctive pre-war style was stimulated by Paul Klee’s drawings that showed the expressive effect achieved through allusion to the formal structure and discursive associations of children’s drawings.⁹ Klee seems to have revealed the possibility of using such allusions to evoke the franticness and violence of modern life.

The Emergence of *Kriegsgraphik*

Grosz was, thus, an emerging graphic artist with an individual style on the eve of World War I. The events of August 1914, however, completely changed the art world and the trajectory of his career. For instance, all humor magazines, regardless of their political leanings, immediately turned into patriotic propaganda organs, while *Licht und Schatten* ceased publication for several months (Simmons, “War” 46-47; Knoery, “Arts graphiques”). Other art journals reduced

⁹ These were first shown at the Deutscher Herbstsalon in fall 1913, the catalogue of which was in Grosz’s library.

their size and began to publish articles about past war-related art as well as letters from artists who were now fighting at the front. New journals devoted to “war graphics” arose, the first being *Kriegszeit* and *Zeit-Echo*.¹⁰ The former was a four-page weekly that contained lithographs by members of the Berlin Secession, poems, and short essays, all about the war (Benson). *Zeit-Echo* had similar content, only the lithographs were by members of the Munich Secession and the essays were more substantial. Numerous publications followed, the most significant being *Die Front*, which appeared in November 1914 as a 4-page bimonthly version of *Licht und Schatten*, and *Wieland*, a fourteen-page bimonthly with color lithography on high quality paper that began in April 1915. The latter was closely connected to Grosz’s school, since Bruno Paul, the school’s director, was the publisher, Orlik was on the editorial committee, and many teachers and students contributed drawings. Given Grosz’s involvement with graphic art to this point in his career, the absence of any contributions by him to such journals during 1914-1915 is significant.

Being age twenty at the time of the war’s outbreak, Grosz knew that he would be quickly called to service and decided to volunteer for a regiment that was garrisoned only a few kilometers from his studio. He had, however, already expressed a negative view of the military in a letter of July 1913, written while visiting his mother in Thorn, where she had moved to manage the officers’ club of a new garrison. He complained about the numerous soldiers, saying “my social-democratic anti-militarist brain is affected by the uniformed life here” (*Briefe* 26). While there is little information about his first period of service, which ended in May 1915 when he was discharged because of a severe sinus infection, he described it as follows: “The time that I spent under the tight reins of militarism was a period of constant resistance – and I know there was not one thing I did that did not utterly disgust me” (32). He also expressed mock disappointment at no longer being able “to drip the semen of culture in all the barbarian nations against whom we must fight” (30). Later he recalled that, while he had begun to lose his naïve belief that “whatever was printed was precisely the truth” during the years just prior to the war, the war’s outbreak “made clear to me that the majority of people were weak-willed, as they moved enthusiastically through the streets, spellbound, without exception, by the wishes of the military. I felt this pressure around me, as well, but I was not enchanted, because I saw a threat in it to the individual freedom that lived within me” (“*Lebenserinnerungen III*” 109).

Late spring of 1915, when Grosz reentered civilian life, was a moment when the German art world began to take account of art’s role in support of the war effort. The Great Berlin Art Exhibition, which opened in March and closed in May, was held in the Academy of Fine Arts rather than the Glass Palace, its usual venue, with one fifth the number of works shown in 1914. A section of works by war artists – portraits of military leaders by Hugo Vogel and sketches of the Western

¹⁰ For the term’s use and an early discussion, see Zeitler.

and Eastern fronts by Fritz Rhein and Ludwig Dettmann, drew much attention, with Eduard Plietzsche writing, "Dettmann found a new effective form, which no longer has anything in common with customary battle paintings, for the new content of this war" (341). Various commercial galleries had also begun to show war-related art, one of the first being an exhibition entitled *Der Krieg* at Salon Neue Kunst in Munich during Feb.-March 1915 ("Aus der Sammlerwelt"). Hans Goltz, the gallery's owner, also published two portfolios, entitled *Kriegsbilderbogen Münchner Künstler*, each with twelve hand-colored lithographs by various Munich artists, as well as four portfolios by individual artists – Hermann Ebers, René Bach, Richard Seewald, and Erich Thum (Scheffler, "Neue Bücher"). June saw the opening of an exhibition of art more closely linked to current printing technology, when the *Leipziger Illustrierte Zeitung* showed 400 sketches done by its artists at the Association of Berlin Artists ("Ausstellung"). Reproduction of such images was an enormous and truly remarkable task, for a single issue might contain thirty-five black and white reproductions of paintings and drawings, fifteen photographs, and one full-page color reproduction of a painting. These were produced by a large staff of artists who traveled to the various war fronts and sent their works back to be photographically reproduced ("Unsere Künstler").

Over the course of the summer such exhibitions continued and drew public attention to two war artists, in particular, whose graphics began to be highly praised. During June and July the Galerie Caspari in Munich showed works by Fritz Erler, an artist who had been attached to the Sixth Army in Belgium and France during 1914, an exhibition about which one critic wrote, "the highly stimulating exhibition came at the right time for our sadly resigned artistic life" (Schroeter 183).¹¹ A portfolio entitled *1914-15* was published that contained high-quality reproductions of eighteen of his watercolors and twelve of works by Ferdinand Spiegel, a younger colleague who worked alongside him. Erler's work was praised for the way his austere Nordic style created "a monument to the quiet heroism of our soldiers" (Braungart 30).

Willy Jaeckel, the other artist who attracted attention, produced art of a very different character (Schubert). After his arrival in Berlin in 1913, his work quickly found critical support, with his paintings' "forward-striving pathos" being compared to Ludwig Meidner (Klein 517). His prints were numerous and well-praised, so it was understandable that he involved himself with war graphics and expressed relief that his salary as editor of *Die Front* would allow him to continue to support his family. By the end of 1915 five lithographs had been published in *Kriegszeit*, while fifteen had appeared in *Die Front* by the time of its twenty-second and final issue in August 1915. The journal reverted to its former title with the next issue, which focused on Jaeckel's work with an essay that praised a portfolio of lithographs entitled *Memento 1914/15* and asserted that Jaeckel had found his true

¹¹ Quoting from "Galerie Caspari, Kriegsbilder von Prof. Erler," *Münchner Post*, No. 149, 30 June 1915.

subject in the war (Hahn). I. B. Neumann's gallery exhibited the portfolio's proofs along with *Assault*, a monumental canvas representing life-size German soldiers storming a trench, during June 1915. When these works were also exhibited in the Berlin Secession exhibition during fall 1915, a critic described *Assault* as "one of the few pictures that moves beyond basic illustration to express the feeling and power of war" (Friedenberger), while Karl Scheffler termed it the exhibition's most important work – "an odd mixture of actuality, psychology that oversteps reality, stormy theatricality, and a cool fresco-like and old-master character" ("Berliner Sezession" 155).

Jaeckel indicated that when he began the painting he was still under the "mass hypnosis" that affected many Germans as they enjoyed the feeling of a unified nation. Indeed, support for the war is clearly seen in "Close with the Enemy," a lithograph in the first issue of *Die Front*, in which German soldiers have shown bravery in crossing no-mans-land and overrunning an enemy trench ("Ran an der Feind!"). They have done their duty despite the horror of having to bayonet and club their opponents. He soon came, however, to see the war as "homicidal action in an indifferent landscape," a quality seen in *Memento 1914/15* since the nationalities of the combatants are not emphasized and the focus is not on victory, but on the sheer horror of war (Klein 552). However, there is no clear anti-war message in his work for *Kriegszeit*, where rape is attributed to the Russians and Germans are asked to remember the patriotic actions of past Germans, such as Götz von Berlichingen.¹² He also drew portraits of German military leaders that heroized them by demeanor, caption, and association with past Germans, as in his juxtaposition of Senior General von Mackensen with Ulrich von Hutten.¹³ Jaeckel's involvement with war graphics delayed his call to active service and advanced his career through commissions, leading to his appointment to the executive committee of the Berlin Secession in May 1916 and election to the Prussian Academy of Fine Arts in 1919 (Klein 26-34).

Grosz's trajectory was different, for he turned away from the path that his pre-war participation in *Licht und Schatten* had promised. A stipend from the Teaching Institute, which ceased while he was in the army but was reinstated when he was discharged, met his basic economic needs (White 106). Free of the army, he began to interact with Otto Nerlinger, a friend and fellow student, who was producing a series of lithographs for *Kriegszeit*; so Grosz certainly saw the earning potential of such work.¹⁴ Rendered in a loose impressionist style typical of *Kriegszeit*, four of these portrayed wounded soldiers relaxing on the grounds of temporary hospitals around Berlin. Simultaneously, however, Nerlinger created colored drawings of an area along the Spree River in Berlin-Treptow in a style similar to the knife-edge manner that had emerged in Grosz's work during 1915 (Schröder-Kehler 12-31).

¹² *Kriegszeit*, vol. 1, no. 32, 1915 and vol. 1, no. 60, 1916.

¹³ *Die Front*, vol. 5, no. 17, 1915.

¹⁴ "Besuch im Lazarett," "Lazarett in Südende," "Im Grunewald," and "Auf dem Tempelhofer Feld."

This area had become a popular recreational area after the Berlin Trade Exhibition of 1896, but with the war the restaurants were converted to hospitals. One of the drawings depicts the nailing of a large cross with black, white, and red banners flying above, one of some 20 *Kriegswahrzeichen* (war emblems) – wooden images of various symbols into which people could pay to hammer a nail to support a war-related cause – in Berlin (Schneider 146). A newspaper reported that its purpose was to raise funds for Princess August Wilhelm's hospital train, and that its dedication on 31 July 1915 was attended by large numbers of wounded soldiers and their friends. The article explains the drawing's imagery: "They lie on the lawns and sit in comfortable chairs and wait for the pleasure steamers. The upper Spree has become a recreational beach for many soldiers and friends come from all directions" ("Kriegsdenkmäler"). The drawings' frivolous mood must have been intentionally ironic, for one (fig. 3), dated 28 August 1915, turned serious in its depiction of six war cripples morosely enjoying themselves in a garden while wearing their Iron Cross medals.

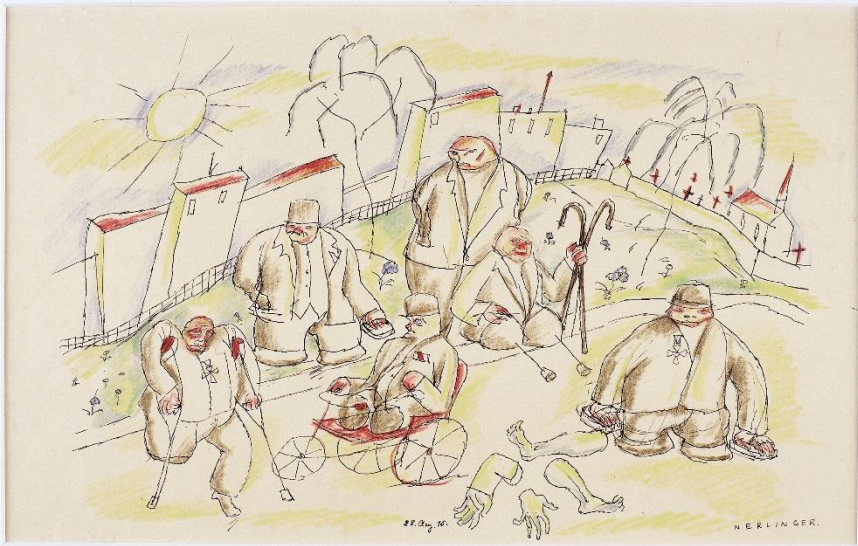


Figure 3: Oskar Nerlinger, *Mutilated Soldiers*, 28 August 1915. Ink and colored crayon on paper. Musée d'Art moderne et contemporain de Strasbourg. Photo credit: M. Bertola /Musées de la ville de Strasbourg © S. Nerlinger, Berlin.

Such candor could not, of course, appear in war graphic journals and did not advance Nerlinger's career, for he was drafted into the army in fall 1915. Grosz produced no work as directly critical as this, but he did treat the theme of war in transfer lithographs. It is not known if he anticipated publication of the lithographs, but the editions were small and none depict an active battle; rather, all are the aftermath – devastated landscapes with the dead or prisoners being

moved to the rear (Dückers cat. no. E 27, 26 and 134). In contrast to impressionist treatments of prisoners trudging in ranks through seasonal landscapes, Grosz employed a distinctive union of realism and caricature.¹⁵ The uniforms of the German guard and Russian prisoners are succinctly rendered, yielding a somewhat sympathetic but also satirical vision of the older German soldier's boredom as smoke curls from his long-stemmed pipe under his *Pickelhaube*. While panoramic views of battlefields appear in the illustrated war journals, most are action scenes, not the mute residue (fig. 4) of infantry charges into barbed wire and machine guns.¹⁶ When German corpses are shown, they are usually treated with reverence through a eulogizing of individual sacrifice, quite unlike the sprawl and entanglement of Grosz's bodies, which are strangely insubstantial because of their incomplete and nervous outlines.¹⁷ Similarly the scattered weapons appear ridiculous in their stick-like character, while the shell craters' resemblance to ulcers and micro-organisms is repulsive and the unanswered prayer in the lower right corner is pathetic.

There are, however, drawings by Grosz of dead soldiers (Jentsch 61) in which absolute horror rules and ridicule plays little role. Although very different in style, the bodies' dismemberment and disarticulation remind of Francisco Goya's *Disasters of War*, a more monstrous grotesque rooted in trauma (Connelley 115-48). Jaeckel reported that he created prints in late 1915 that responded to Goya's series (Klein 552). Such images, however, were not published, and his images of German heroism could still be seen in an issue of *Licht und Schatten* in March 1916.¹⁸ In the face of such continuing support for the war effort, Grosz turned to the horrific, perhaps in response to the few photographs that showed the dead decaying in the trenches, and all that remains of ridicule in such works is the scrawled ink that forms the grin/grimace of rictus as it takes over the entire drawing.

While Grosz's reaction to war graphics is found in the lithographs, response is also seen in his sketchbooks. The caption above a portly and bleary-eyed draftee in Sketchbook 15/3 from fall 1915 indicates that he is an older man pulled from an occupation of fine carpentry into a third-rate military unit (Lewis 45, 58 [23 recto]). Heavily weighted with his pack and other equipment, he seems the opposite of Max Liebermann's heroic and stalwart infantryman, who both stands at attention and strides forward on the covers of *Kunst und Künstler in Kriege*. It is likewise different from the dignified and realistic portraits of specific soldiers that appeared

¹⁵ For comparison, see Wilhelm Wagner's "Rückkehr ins Gefangenenlager" and "Gefangene Franzosen auf der Landstraße in Zossen," also from 1915.

¹⁶ See Erich Büttner, "Sturm auf ein Fort."

¹⁷ For comparison, see the lithographs by Josef Wackerle, with poems by Karl Stieler and Fritz von Unruh in *Wieland*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1915, p. 3; and vol. 1, no. 10, 1915, p. 3.

¹⁸ *Licht und Schatten*, vol. 6, no. 12, 1916, cover.



Figure 4: George Grosz, *Battlefield with Dead Soldiers*, 1915. Offset lithograph, 23.8 x 39.8 cm. © 2018 Estate of George Grosz / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

in *Wieland*.¹⁹ Other sketches skewer the use of religious sentiment in support of the war. His drawing of German anti-balloon guns shooting at an angel who bears the palm fronds of peace seems to mock the use of angels in several war graphics (Lewis 45, 52 [12 verso]).²⁰ Another drawing that shows death floating forward with a small Christmas tree to the song of "Silent Night" recalls not just the ersatz trees produced for use at the front, but also illustrations in all manner of publications that sought to bring Christmas cheer and content to the home and war fronts (Lewis 45, 53 [13 verso]).²¹

¹⁹ Lithographs by Hermann Peters, H. A. Müller, and Erich Büttner in *Wieland*, vol. 1, no. 15, 1915; vol. 1, no. 26, 1915; vol. 1, no. 28, 1915; and vol. 1, no. 33, 1916, p. 7.

²⁰ Angels floating about the battle field are seen in Willy Geiger, "Heilige Nacht," *Die Front*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1914, p. 2, and in a print by Georg Mathéy in *Der Krieg*, a portfolio of 12 woodcuts produced by the Schülerschaft am Kgl. Kunstgewerbe-Museum in 1915. It is reproduced and the portfolio is discussed in Walter Foizick, "Zu einer neuen Kriegsmappe," *Zeit-Echo*, vol. 1, no. 16, 1915, p. 248.

²¹ See the Christmas trees in *Die Front*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1914, p. 1; and *Jugend*, vol. 14, no. 52, 1914, p. 1.

Response to *Hurrah-Kitsch*

A drawing entitled "Portrait of Sergeant Fritz Krause" (Lewis 45, 58 [25 recto]), which portrays a non-commissioned officer with his Iron Cross, responded to another type of war propaganda. He stands against a background that, with its curtain, column, and potted plant, recalls portraits of military leaders in the Baroque tradition, although perhaps it more directly references popular postcards such as one entitled "Our Kaiser," which shows Wilhelm II in field-gray uniform, including the field-cover on his *Pickelhaube*, Iron Crosses on his breast, and hands resting on the hilt of his saber (Lewis 45).²² Grosz's background recalls the many composite photographic postcards that juxtaposed German soldiers with the Niederwalddenkmal at Rüdesheim am Rhein that had been dedicated on 28 September 1883 to memorialize unification of Germany after the Franco-Prussian War.²³ The soldiers are associated with the statue of Germania that overlooked the Rhine valley and served as a symbolic sentry protecting the homeland. The sketch shows his early interest in the type of postcards that have been said to have stimulated the photomontage postcards that he later sent to friends at the front (Zervigón, "Postcards").

Propaganda postcards may have also stimulated his caricature (fig. 5) of a teenage girl. Dressed conservatively with a school portfolio under her arm, her head attracts attention because of washes of color. Vivid red lips contrast with a green wash that bathes her face, which is marked by acne, producing a lurid image of adolescence. There are, however, important details – the sailor's collar and cap on her head with a tally reading "SM Emden" – that would have been a telling comment in 1915, because of a story that was continually spread across media during 1914-15.²⁴ *Emden* was the name of the most famous German ship of the war's first year. Its successes during the war's first months won respect even in the Allied press, both for its attacks' verve and the chivalrous conduct of its captain, toward prisoners, which earned him the title of "the gentleman raider."²⁵ The ship's exploits ended in November 1914, when it was sunk by an Australian cruiser just off Direction Island in the Cocos. Fifty crew members, however, escaped and over a six-month period made their way back to Germany, where all the men, as well as the ship itself, were awarded Iron Crosses during June 1915.

²² "Unser Kaiser," postcard at <https://yooniqimages.com/images/detail/102248831/Creative/german-propaganda-postcard-our-kaiser-depicting-kaiser-wilhelm-ii-in-uniform-during-the-first-world-war-with-a-flag-flying-behind-him>.

²³ "Die Wacht am Rhein" postcards at https://deutsche-schutzgebiete.de/wacht_am_rhein.htm.

²⁴ See, for instance, the photographs, drawings, and maps spread across seven pages in *Illustrierte Zeitung*, vol. 144, no. 3754, 1915.

²⁵ The literature and films about the ship are voluminous. For a recent study of the landing party's return, see Dreier.



Figure 5: George Grosz, *Teenage Girl*, 1915. Pencil, ink, and watercolor on paper, 10.4 x 39.8 cm. Sketchbook 1915/2 (Oct. 15 – Nov. 15, 1915) © 2018 Estate of George Grosz / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Numerous images related to the *Emden* appear in the war graphic journals as well as the humor magazines, and three illustrated books, which were part of an important genre of war literature for youth, were published that encouraged teenagers to model their actions after the sailors. Boys and girls took to wearing sailor caps, which were manufactured and sold to exploit the interest.²⁶ Finally, sentimental postcards, such as "A German Lad" drawn by Ak Moratz, which depicts a boyishly handsome sailor from the *Emden* with pipe in hand and the Imperial naval flag behind, were published, likely leading Grosz to respond to such "hurrah patriotism" with the dog's stream of urine.

²⁶ A boy wearing such a sailor cap is seen in *Kriegswinter*, a painting by Hans Baluschek of 1917 that is in the Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin.

The attention of the German public and art world had been directed to such “war kitsch” by *Krieg und Kunstgewerbe*, an exhibition held at the Landes-Gewerbemuseum in Stuttgart during summer 1915. A reviewer praised the section that focused on high-quality war graphics such as the aforementioned magazines and portfolios as well as some postcards. However, he mentioned how “predigested sentimentality,” which included “painted photographs of lovers saying farewell, dream images of the beloved at sentry duty or in the trenches, and similar things,” was one of the categories into which poor-quality postcards had been divided. He also castigated the various articles of use, such as beer steins, ashtrays, and porcelain cups, that were made from shoddy materials and shaped like or decorated with images of artillery shells, iron crosses, or Hindenburg’s face. The exhibition did a great service in “opening the eyes of the public about the existence of kitsch within war-related applied art,” an awareness that is seen in “Kriegsgreul,” an illustration by Friedrich Heubner (Rapp). Grosz, however, did not push this kitsch away; rather he linked himself with it. Writing to a friend who was doing occupational therapy with wounded soldiers, he said he wished he could be the friend’s student and learn how to produce art made from artillery shells because he would like to open a small business since it was more lucrative than being a “fine artist,” and signed off with “Long Live Kitsch! Eyyiva la Kitsch 1914/15” (*Briefe* 35). Wieland Herzfelde later recalled that a year prior to this letter, when he had first met Grosz at Ludwig Meidner’s studio in fall 1915, Grosz had played the role of a Dutch merchant who proposed to use war cripples to produce ashtrays and other usable items from pieces of shrapnel, which he would sell at a good profit. Thus, Grosz suggested that “hurrah kitsch” could go a step further and make trench art a lucrative commercial enterprise using the skills of soldiers who could no longer fight.

The irony of Grosz’s associating himself with the war’s worst commercial and aesthetic production was paralleled by actions of Franz Pfemfert, the editor of *Die Aktion*, the avant-garde expressionist journal that published a poem and non-war-related drawing by Grosz during 1915.²⁷ Wanting to critique the war, but also to avoid censorship, Pfemfert began to collect and publish the most extreme statements in support of the war, explaining: “The folder, in which I keep them, has already become wickedly fat-bellied. . . . The scissors are squeaking; I am cutting out the time; it shall speak in my ACTION; for itself and for me” (Pfemfert, “Ich schneide”).²⁸ Three months later he created a related visual image of war graphics, in which the front pages of five magazines are layered: *Ullk*, *Kriegszeit*, *Kladderash*, *Jugend*, and *Simplicissimus*. It is captioned “From the darkest . . . (Completion of Th. Th. Heine’s series),” a reference to the satirical attacks on German authorities that Heine had begun to launch in the pages of *Simplicissimus*

²⁷ “Der Mörder” and “Lied.”

²⁸ For how *Neue Jugend* also employed this strategy to avoid censorship, see Zervigón, *John Heartfield*, 86-88.

during 1899 (Pfemfert, "Aus dem dunkelsten"). The combination of caption and drawing suggests that the days when *Simplicissmus* had been a critical force in public life were long past, it having become a war propaganda organ like the other magazines. This was very likely a response to Heine's most recent drawing, entitled "Apostles of Peace," which shows a soldier with a severely injured arm, who is wearing an Iron Cross and sitting at a café table, while intellectuals and artists mummer that they cannot wait for an honorable victory since they have immediate need of the public attention that the war has stolen from them (Heine).

One of Grosz's sharpest anti-war statements was a posthumously published poem of 1914-1915 that alluded to *Kerbsschnitzerei*, a type of trench art/kitsch, and used it in a grotesque manner (*Ach Knallige Welt* 10). Its lengthy title – "Soldiers 1914 / Notched with a pocket knife in a table's edge by one of the comrades" – was followed by eighty German surnames arranged in fourteen stanzas, the final one reading:

Klassing
Grosspietsch
Wachs
and
Pruss
and
von Kamecke
to
the end.

This is a poem like a casualty list reported to a general or printed in a newspaper. As the number grows it becomes more and more difficult to equate a particular notch with the memory of the individual for whom it was cut, a process, the poem asserts, with no conclusion in sight, for "total war" is "to the end." The object (fig. 6) that evoked this process of repeated notching was a piece of *Kerbsschnitzerei*, a decorative craft that embellished articles of use with pleasing patterns of notches. While the process had decorated furniture for centuries, it began to be promoted by art educators during the 1870s and 1880s as a hobby for boys and men (Lüning). By the turn-of-the-century boxes decorated with it became one type of souvenir, along with colored regimental prints with openings for individual photographs, porcelain pipe bowls, and beer steins, that could be purchased at shops near an army garrison and through which young men memorialized completion of their military service. There were also kits that allowed a soldier to follow a printed

design and notch the box himself. The process continued to be used for boxes and picture frames produced in the dugouts during the war, but they were now made from scavenged materials and held quite different types of memories (Fuchs 41). Given Grosz's enthusiasm for stories of the American West, however, the notching likely alluded not only to the loss of comrades, but also to the taking of lives by the carver.²⁹



Figure 6: Trench art box. Repurposed cigar box, with layers of notched, cut-out, and painted forms attached with small nails; iron handle; and interior covered with red floral wallpaper. 24 x 12 x 14.5 cm. Photo: Peter Weckherlin/HGV Eningen unter Achaim.

Grosz's poem works in a manner very different from the poems that appeared in the war graphic journals or the "new pathos" of expressionist war poetry. The poem by Fritz von Unruh that accompanies Josef Wackerle's lithograph in *Wieland* reads:

Trotting the road home

²⁹ Although the practice of cutting notches in guns to record kills was not widespread in the American West, it was reported to be in German Western novels such as those of Karl May. See, for instance, the scene where Sans-Ear [Sam Hawerfield] explains the custom to Charlie [Old Shatterhand] after killing several Oglala Sioux (May 19-20).

After the bloody battle.

Saw in evening glow

A freshly dug grave.

A rider stood there,

Who decorated it with flowers,

Stopped my horse

Bowed myself down:

“Did your comrade die?”

“Was your brother killed, friend?”

Received no answer,

Who cried so bitterly.

Saluted quietly and rode,

Left him devoutly alone

What the rider suffered

Will remain immortal.

The pathos felt by the rider and the reader upon viewing the comrade, who is totally absorbed by the pain of his friend's death, acts, like the memorial cross, to recognize and redeem the individual's death. This religious quality is also found in a poem entitled “Requiem to the Dead in the Argonne Forest” by Paul Zech. Reports about the ferocity of the fighting in the Argonne shocked the public during late 1914, for it took place at very close range as German and French forces continually raided well-engineered positions within densely forested and hilly terrain. The tangled and explosive phrases of Zech's mass for the dead evoke the terror experienced by soldiers continually engaged in small unit and close quarter action in a forest strung with barbed wire and pitted with redoubts. Its final lines address the guilt of survivors – “Wretched as a worm / are we who still live

without being stepped on” – and their prayer for those who have been returned to God in “Elijah’s fiery chariot,” their expression of faith that the blood spilled has impregnated the ground with new life, and their request – “O World, repeat you the Amen / with all bells resounding.”

Unlike Zech’s poem, there is no redemption in Grosz’s, just an objective record that takes the form of a piece of trench art, a sad cultural product. Unlike Jaeckel, who criticized those “who make a business out of war emergency,” Grosz saw such commercial exploitation as the fullest expression of the society that had produced the war (Klein 539). There was little likelihood, however, that the direct criticisms of the war such as his poem and drawings of decaying bodies could evade military censorship and be published. His artistic solution was to apply the sober cynicism shaped by war graphics and hurrah kitsch to images of German society. This refusal of the activist expressionist stance against the war presented a path beyond its pathos (White 63-66, 85, 95, 162). Herzfelde recalled that upon seeing such drawings for the first time in early fall 1915 he and his brother, John Heartfield, were “shocked, sobered, tingly, invigorated” as if they had taken a “cold shower”:

Grosz . . . caused us to no longer experience the daily world as dull, banal, and boring, but as a drama in which stupidity, brutality, and rot played the principle roles. He awaked in both of us a new, very critical relationship to our previous artistic efforts. (“George Grosz” 1230-31).

They made an agreement with Grosz that they would develop a journal in which Grosz’s drawings would be reproduced. A prospectus was published in May 1916, after Heartfield had found Heinrich Birkholz, a printer of the quality he demanded, and Herzfelde had negotiated rights to *Neue Jugend*, a preexisting literary journal (Weikop 799-802). Two drawings appeared in issue 7 of June 1916, two in issue 10 of October 1916, and the *Erste George Grosz Mappe*, a portfolio of nine transfer lithographs, was published by the Malik Verlag, Herzefelde’s new publishing house, during winter 1916-17. This realized Grosz’s previous desire to publicize his work either through print portfolios or books of photographically reproduced drawings like those by Baluschek, Zille, Orlik, and other popular illustrators; for he had designed at least four covers for publications on themes of modern metropolitan life (Jentsch 22-29).³⁰

³⁰ See, for instance, the cover drawing for Hans Baluschek’s *Spreeluft*, which shares themes with the *Erste Grosz Mappe*.

The First Drawings for *Neue Jugend*

Grosz's first two works (figs. 1 & 2) in *Neue Jugend* were listed only as "drawings," but were then given titles of *German Street Scene* and *Gold Diggers* when their availability for purchase as independent etchings was announced in issue 11-12 of February-March 1917. The theme of the American Wild West in the second emerged from drawings that Grosz had begun to produce during his youth, stimulated by reading novels by American and German authors such as James Fenimore Cooper and Karl May (Tower; Kort and Hollein; Czaplicka). While these authors represented a youth literature that was approved by German authorities, Grosz, like many German boys, was also an avid consumer of adventure fiction, cheap pamphlets that were published as series. Some of these, such as those about Nick Carter, a detective, and Buffalo Bill were translations of books from the United States, while others were developed in Germany. During the years before World War I, German religious and educational leaders campaigned against this so-called *Schundliteratur* (trashy literature) (Maase). After his move to Berlin, Grosz designed illustrations both for highly regarded youth literature such as *Robinson Crusoe* and for sensationalist Wild West pulp fiction (Jentsch 10).

Gold Diggers shares much with a color pencil drawing in Sketchbook 1912/3, in which frontiersmen smoke, drink, and play cards while camping among trees along a river (Nisbet 67, 151 [5 recto]). An Indian brave, who peeks around a tree, and a camp member, who stands guard with a rifle in the background, suggest some danger. All are oblivious to the dead man without boots who hangs from a tree, having received frontier justice a short time before. A card table is the focus in *Gold Diggers*; however, because of cropped figures at the print's edges, the scene appears to expand beyond its borders. All of the figures are seen from different perspectives, creating a turbulent imaginative construction. While foreshortenings and creases suggest spatial volume, outline dominates, resulting in transparencies, most readily seen in the table. Rather than modeling form, hatchings serve to coarsen figures, suggesting unkemptness, alcoholism, or syphilis, and their crude ugliness contrasts with the kitschy sweetness of floral sprigs. As spare as the drawing is, however, there is keen attention to detail, which goes beyond most caricature, as in a pistol butt's lanyard ring and a knife's carved bone handle, as well as the convincing slouch of the "gold diggers." They seem bored and oblivious to the actions around them, which include a hooded man being lynched from a tree and a sprawled man with a knife in his back. Whether this depicts frontier justice for a murder is unclear; however, while a clergyman with his rosary pays no attention, a small child standing in the distance by the train stares with eyes as open as dots can be. It reminds that Grosz reserved his truly child-like style for children being educated in the ways of an anarchic world, where violence is a given and money rules.

The actual labor of “gold digging” is never shown in Grosz’s treatments of the theme, the only evidence being a shovel in the hands and boots on the feet of a gold digger in a large ink drawing (White 91). Nor is the location ever specific; however, Grosz’s interest in the theme was probably linked to gold’s discovery in the Klondike in 1896, which gave rise to the final major gold rush of the nineteenth century. Jack London, a writer whom Grosz admired and who based short stories and novels on his experiences in the Klondike, addressed the lure that the promise of making one’s fortune in the wilderness held in a world that was becoming more and more civilized at the turn of the century.³¹

Thus, with unconscious foresight, did mature society make room for its adolescent members. True, the new territory was almost barren; but its several hundred thousand square miles of frigidity at least gave breathing space to those who else would have suffocated at home. (“At the Rainbow’s End” 230-31)

Burning Daylight, London’s novel of 1910, recounted the life of Elam Harnish after he entered the Yukon in 1883 as a very young miner, quickly gaining respect among the “sourdoughs” for his character and physical abilities.³² Living life as a high-stakes poker game, best played by heeding hunches, Harnish participates in the major strike, moving from being an admired figure in the Klondike’s initial society of individual prospectors to being its capitalistic boss, who pioneers the use of industrialized mining techniques. Harnish makes a fortune, and after leaving the Klondike in 1901 plays the stock exchanges of San Francisco and New York, before saving his fortune by responding to a stock swindle with the threat of a Colt pistol, just as he would have reacted to bottom dealing in a card game.

America, particularly London’s description of the anarchic individualism in the Klondike, seems to have become Grosz’s vision of an alternative society to war-time Germany (Knoery, “Panopticum” 19-11). The two figures at the bottom of *Gold Diggers* suggest salesmen and engineers, and the background, with its train viaduct, commercial buildings, electric lines, and American flag remind one of the frontier towns of the new century with their connections to the wider world. Advertising on storefronts suggests how different companies competed to satisfy the thirst for gin, the signs’ aggressive simplicity prioritizing functionality over aesthetics in a way that was said to differentiate American from German advertising (Simmons, “Advertising Seizes Control”). Similar directness is found

³¹ Grosz recommended London’s books numerous times, writing in an undated letter: “To your selection of really good books, I add *Andersen’s Fairy Tales* (first class) - Cooper’s *Leatherstocking* - in addition *Robinson Crusoe* - then from Cooper’s *Leatherstocking* derive a host of frontier novels (Jack London still represents the very best) and all of Defoe’s novels about the sea” (*Teurer Makkaroni!* 105).

³² Tauchnitz Verlag in Leipzig published an English edition of *Burning Daylight* in 1911, but it was not translated into German until 1926, as *Lockruf des Goldes*.

in Grosz's "Gesang der Goldgräber" (Song of the Gold-diggers), a poem that appeared in *Neue Jugend*'s double issue of February-March 1917, which shouts "Gold! Gold!! Gold!!!" Just as express trains link San Francisco to New York, so the white slave trade connects brothels and gold fields across the world. Grosz suggests that economic lust rules all and ends the poem with these lines that follow his triple exclamation:

Gold-diggers up,

forward!

Klondike beckons again!!!

Knives tight and spades –

Already the engineers are lining up,

Black magicians in American business suits.

America!!! Future!!!

Engineer and salesman!

Steam ships and express trains!

But above my eyes

Stretch giant bridges

And the smoke of a hundred cranes.

Interestingly, an article by Victor Noack in *Die Aktion* in 1914 had drawn connections between gold diggers in the Wild West, who, in their greed, may kill and rob their comrades, and businessmen in Berlin who make enormous sums of money from land speculation, using the laws of the "God-given state order" to slowly kill millions who continue to live in poverty as a result of such business practices. The author applauded how Werner Hegemann's book *Der Städtebau*, which described Berlin's social problems as a *Mietkasernestadt* (rental barrack or tenement city), exposed networks of state and private power that shaped cities and resisted social reform in order to further the economic interests of the powerful, issues that he sought to solve through leadership of the Steering Committee for the Promotion of Greater Berlin. The article ends with a discussion of how decisions about the location of elevated and subway lines in both New York City

and Berlin were controlled by such interests.³³ While there is no evidence that Grosz was aware of the book review, it shows the way the image of the “gold digger” could be critically deployed in contemporary discourse.

The content of *Gold Diggers* also challenged war censorship. While pulp fiction series about the German military had been criticized by authorities when they first emerged in 1908, they were looked on more favorably when German youths switched their interest from American subjects during 1914-15. (Donson 589-92; Maase 157-59, 192-95). Concern about their sensationalism soon reemerged, however, and efforts were made to censor both German and American series. German authorities began to finance the publication of hardcover war literature for youth, often illustrated by well-known military artists, such as the books about the *Emden* (Donson; Maase 205-28). Thus, Grosz's continued use of the imagery of the American pulp fiction stood in the face of the German war effort (Simmons, “Chaplin Smiles” 22).

Grosz gave *German Street Scene* the title *Durchhalten* (*Persevere*) and dated it 1915 when it was reproduced in a book of his drawings in 1930 (*Die Gezeichneten* 78-78). “Persevere” had become an important slogan in late 1914 when the rapid victory on the Western front that had been promised by the Schlieffen Plan failed to occur, despite enormous expenditures of military supplies and a half-million casualties. Faced with trench warfare and growing shortages and hardships at home, the slogan was used to bolster the morale of Germans facing a war of uncertain duration (Chickering 17-31).³⁴ Certainly, if *Neue Jugend* had attached such a patriotic slogan in 1916 to a scene of a street being crossed by such disturbing figures, the censor would have shut down the journal immediately.

The print's initial title, as well as that of *Suburban Street* (fig. 7), the now lost oil painting on which the print was based, relate them to Berlin's tradition of street paintings, which had reached an apogee with Ernst Ludwig Kirchner during 1914-15. However, examination of the catalogues of the Secession and the Great Berlin Art Exhibition shows that the number of exhibited paintings that depicted Berlin fell significantly during 1915-16. The most prominent was *Metropolis*, large canvas by Hugo Krayn. When shown at the Berlin Secession exhibition in fall 1915, a critic described it as powerful and expressive in its form and color. Workers and bourgeoisie mix on the street as labor and commerce continue into the night. While elevated trains rush in the background, a handcart and heavily loaded wagon ply the street, the white draft horse occupying the center, as one would expect given

³³ Hegemann organized important city planning exhibitions that pushed social reform. For his early work, see his *Der Städtebau nach den Ergebnissen der Allgemeinen Städtebauausstellung in Berlin*; see also Flick.

³⁴ For an early example of a propaganda pamphlet with discussion of this slogan, see Herman.



Figure 7: George Grosz, *Suburban Street*, 1915. Oil on canvas, 61 x 61 cm. Lost. Reproduced from Willi Wolfradt, *George Grosz*, Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1921, illus. 1.

Krayn's sympathy for Berlin's workers. While one often thinks of artists such as Kirchner's, Meidner's, and Feininger's use of movement to break the picture's confining frame, this characteristic is also found in the work of Berlin's realist painters. In fact, one must think of the latter artists in connection with the way Grosz's work is rooted in the observed reality of and sympathy for Berlin's industrial suburbs, for it is in their work that one finds many of Grosz's themes.

Given Grosz's army service, one might expect a soldier rather than a sailor to figure in his painting, and indeed injured soldiers are seen some drawings. However, sailors appear in several graphic works of 1915 where they are associated with France by a sign and the pom-poms on their caps (Dückers cat. no. E 30, 26 and 135-36). A dedication that reads "To Rachilde" shows that these are illustrations for *Der Liebesturm*, Rachilde's (Marguerite Vallette-Eymery's) novel that had been translated into German in 1913. Rachilde had gained fame by her

public behavior and grotesque erotic writings that often stressed fluid gender identities (Holmes). The novel's narrative voice is male, that of Jean Maleux, a young Breton sailor, who has given up his job in the French navy to take a position as the assistant keeper of a lighthouse on Ar-men, a large rock off the Breton coast. When Jean arrives at Ar-men, he is astonished by the tower's phallic power: "It stands firm, so thick, so tall, that one must admire the strength of the man who contrived it" (Rachilde 11). It is, he realizes, an appropriate home for dutiful men who stand against the wind and sea, forces that he characterizes as a voracious female body that tries to devour the tower. Grosz's drawings respond to various scenes and actions, beginning with a design that turns the cover of 1913 in a more sensational direction by including the female bodies that wash up after storms (Jentsch 28). Other drawings depict how Mathurin Barabus, the head keeper, collects these bodies with a harpoon and defiles them. The episode that affected the treatment of the sailor in *Suburban Street* is found toward the book's end when Jean, having discovered Mathurin's necrophilia, returns to Brest, which he had visited occasionally on leaves from the lighthouse.

He finds that it has changed since his visits and discovers that Marie, a girl about whom he had fantasized marriage, has not only disappeared, but had, in fact, deceived him about her identity. Wandering from bar to bar, he finds himself haunted by the face of one of Mathurin's beheaded victims. A group of women mock him when he worries about having lost his old naval cap in his drunken state. He then meets a sailor, with whom he sings eulogies to the *Marceau*, the battleship on which the sailor had served until its recent decommissioning. Imagining that this is yet another ship taken by the sea, Jean resolves that he must "declare war on the sea, strangle the sea" in order to purge his memory of the beheaded woman's face (166). Moving through the streets in a blood lust, he finds himself with sailors from the *Marceau* in an alley of small brothels where whores call to them from doorways, causing him to imagine that he is again at the Tower of Love surrounded by the sea. When a voice whispers "Little Man," from behind him, he is enraged and thinks: "'Little Man?' I, Jean Maleux! After service as valuable as three men and battling the sea. I shouldn't be called 'Little Man'." When the girl grabs and kisses him, he says "You, you will never kiss anyone again! That's it with your laugh, you dirty whore!" stabbing her with his knife, before walking away and thinking: "I've killed the sea!" (168-69).

After his return to Ar-men he puzzles over what actually happened, but worries mostly about how to replace his cap. Time passes as the keepers mutely carry out their routines, leading Jean to reflect: "We were blind, we obeyed our duty to illuminate the world. Duty is a mania, the most fearsome of all manias" (171). When Mathurin dies, Jean remains as the head keeper and, fearing that he, like Mathurin, will lose his use of language, begins to record his story, ending the novel with the lines:

But involuntarily I do my job. Shaken, I remain at the post. The fixed idea of duty, that is the beginning of madness. And I am mad, because I hope

for nothing more, expect nothing more. . . . not even the beautiful drowned woman at the return of high tide (185).

Jean's naval cap is given subtle iconographic privilege in Rachilde's novel, an authority that is likely also seen in Grosz's painting, where its national marker is no longer a pom-pom, but rather the way the cap's tally is tied in the back with streamers hanging down, as was done in the German navy.³⁵ These flare as the sailor strides forward, emphasis given by his right leg that is radically foreshortened, as if seen from above. His heavily veined hands are about to clench and his snarling grimace reveals that his teeth have already done so. A prostitute approaches him from the side, her right hand cupping her breast, while the left raises her skirt to reveal not just her ankle boots, but also a swelling thigh. The action resembles Jean's final scene in Brest, but there is no knife, unless one notes the vector and bulge at the sailor's groin. The tenements, factories, caravans, circus tents, and vaults of the Berlin rail system are pushed outward, clearing space for the figures who circle round the street light and close at the anticipated exchange between sailor and whore. A portly man who wears a top hat and carries a small coffin under his left arm moves back from the sailor, a movement that reverses in the three male mourners following the hearse. While a figure exits to right, the movement is turned back by the circling dogs and skulking lecher, an instinctual return from death to sex. Potentially violent and sexual exchange aligns with the hearse, which is drawn by a scrawny-ribbed horse and driven by death itself. Grosz recalled that, as a boy in Stolp, he had formed an association between the cortèges that filed into a cemetery and the ranks of delinquents that marched out of an adjacent reform school. Being constantly told that if he did not obey authority he would be taught discipline by two years in a reform school or four years in the army, the appearance of the motif at the moment when he was avoiding national service is not surprising (Grosz, "Lebenserinnerungen" 110-11). Something similar may be said about Rachilde's novel, for themes of transvestism and violent misogyny appear in his sketchbooks and letters at this time (Lewis 42). Reading the novel's dramatization of the madness of the fixed idea of duty seems to have helped him accept the conflicted voices speaking within him. By splitting his identity and literally naming – Grosz, Count Ehrenfried, Dr. William King Thomas – its discordant characters, he made therapeutic and aesthetic use of the grotesque's most essential feature (Lewis 42-43; Grosz, *Briefe* 30-31).

Since *Suburban Street* was lost rather early, there is only Willi Wolfradt's loose characterization of it in 1921:

Knife and revolver are constantly near, the atmosphere is laden with murder, love slaughters victims. Grosz leads us over the street where busy people rush about, numb to the simmering of the apocalypse

³⁵ The pom-pom is seen, however, in *Berlin Street Scene* and also on the cap of the sailor at the bottom of *Riot of the Lunatics*, a well-known drawing of 1916.

around them, and ducking guys leer at females, where glances strip off clothing, and the ghostly lights of world commerce [war] dance between hardly restrained gestures of breasts (8).

Almost nothing may be said about its color, except that it was likely less local and line-bound than *Café*, his first painting of 1915. Attention to modern nocturnal light was, for Theodor Däubler, at the heart of Grosz's unique coloristic qualities, which he described as an iridescence produced through the interactions of various types of electric lights on differing material surfaces (176). *German Street Scene* is closely related to the painting, with purely graphic means of scratched rays evoking the nocturnal iridescence. Figural interactions, rather than being circular, have become horizontal, in accord with the printed page. Simple line and paper surface yield a devastating x-ray vision. Line also speaks – humorously, in the coffin's grin, and emotionally, in the brutal defacements.

Caricature into the Grotesque

Shortly after the first portfolio was published a critic suggested that Wilhelm Busch's child-like style of drawing was the beginning point for Grosz, but it was Salomo Friedlaender, writing as Mynona, the name under which he published grotesques, who most flamboyantly, but also insightfully characterized Grosz's style during 1915-16 (Coellen 348).

Striking! It's him – unmistakably: this is his stylus. But does this hand even use a stylus? Isn't it a knife? A knife that's being flung by a sleight-of-hand artist – no, by a cold-blooded wild Indian, at a victim with masterful skill, and buries itself trembling over and over around the body's outline, almost into its skin, and remains stuck quivering (Mynona 7).

Grosz, he continues, is Lucifer, who has thrown himself from heaven to earth, and, knowing that all art is caricature, transforms the world into a cynical variety theater, his emblem being "heavenly and earthly love in one, nothing other than Titian's method." It was the method of the grotesque as described by Friedlaender elsewhere:

[The grotesque humorist] annoys and shocks the little-uprooted philistine in us, who, out of forgetfulness, feels pretty good in the middle of the caricature of true life; he does this by exaggerating the caricature into the grotesque until he succeeds in expelling him from the delusional paradise of that to which he is accustomed and suggests the true to him, at least as a hunch (327).

If placed within this theoretical frame, the significance of Grosz's choice for the only drawing (fig. 8) that he supplied to a war graphics journal, is perhaps illuminated. Entitled "Bei Siechen" (At Siechen), it appeared in *Wieland* in March

1916, probably through an invitation from Georg Mathéy, and differs from most other drawings in the journal because of its lack of any obvious relationship to the

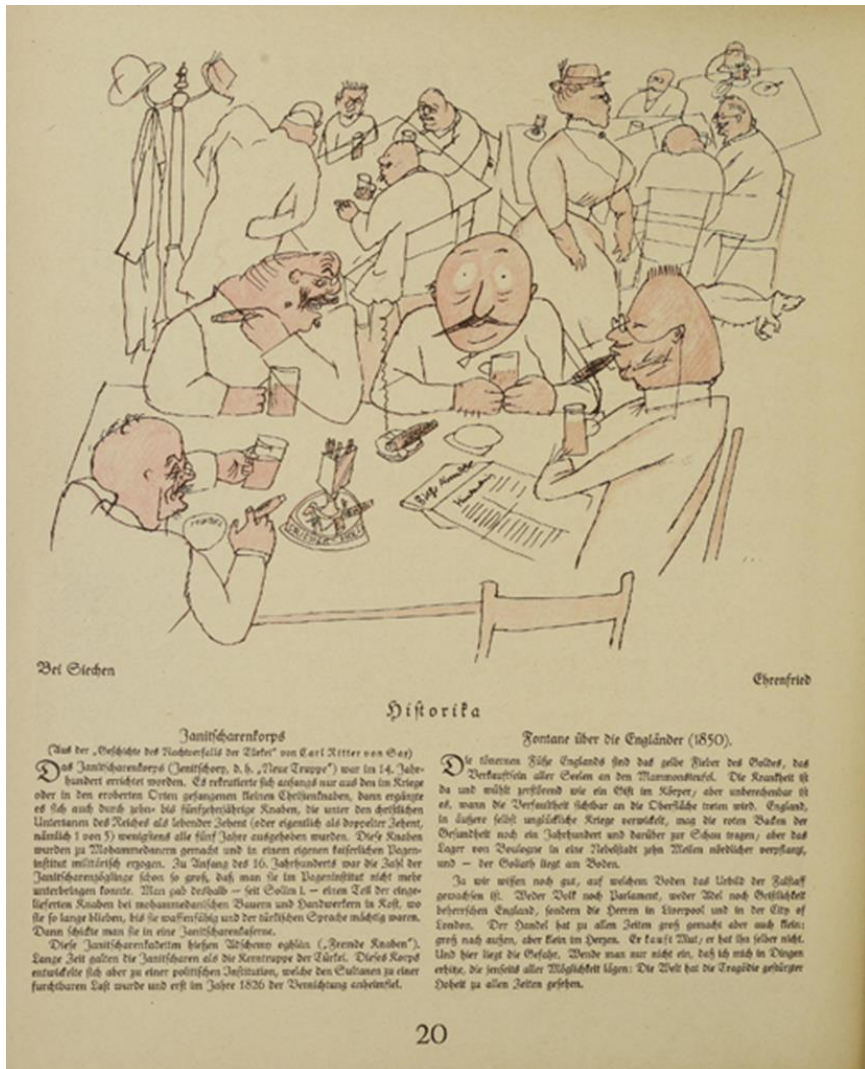


Figure 8: Ehrenfried [George Grosz], “At Siechen,” *Wieland*, vol. 1, no. 49-52, March 1916, p. 20.

war.³⁶ The title refers to the Bierhaus Siechen, which had been built in 1883 in a Neo-Renaissance style in central Berlin, and the drawing's focus is simply a table of regulars, older men conversing as they smoke cigars and drink beer with a copy of the *8-Uhr Abendblatt*, the headline of which reads "Hindenburg," on the table. However, the values that Grosz attached to such men in 1916 was made clear in a letter to a friend that described them as the "red-faced, fossilized, philistine public" who believe everything they read and whenever a "so-called victory" is announced march from the "Bierhaus Siechen to the Chancellery, where some high school principal or bureaucrat sprays a dark window with a speech" (*Briefe* 45). The drawing shows the transmission and wide-eyed acceptance of the talking points and slogans from the government's propaganda offices. The artist's name below the drawing is "Ehrenfried," a reference to Grosz's middle name and one of his three selves – "Count Ehrenfried, the nonchalant aristocrat with manicured fingernails, concerned only with cultivating himself, in a word: the charming aristocratic individualist" (*Briefe* 31).

Given Grosz's enthusiasm, as a youth in Stolp, for Eduard Grützner, the artist who had popularized an affirmative vision of German middle-class conviviality, the drawing may be seen as a further grotesque distortion of a caricature that had existed within himself in the service of what he now sensed to be true (Schwarz 35). If war graphics sought to amplify the voice of authority that demanded that Germans persevere in the war, then Grosz recognized the difficult pain that voice created within himself and expelled it as grotesque images of society in the routine of war.

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³⁶ Mathéy studied with Emil Doepler and E. R. Weiss at the Teaching Institute and Bruno Paul made him responsible for the design of *Wieland* during 1915-18. He drew many decorative surrounds for literary contributions and included drawings by several of his fellow students (Osborn 7). Grosz's first exhibition of his drawings was a joint exhibition with Mathéy and Edmund Fabry, another student at the Teaching Institute, at the Graphische Kabinett of the Kunsthalle Mannheim at the end of May 1916 (Dorn 135).

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